

Farmingdale, NY— Thursday, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) joined with Long Island veterans to present Ivan McRae the Congressional Gold Medal he earned as a Tuskegee Airman. Legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Bush entitled McRae and his fellow Tuskegee Airmen to the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their heroism in World War II. Rep. Israel said, “Ivan McRae served his country when duty called, joining the fight against tyranny from abroad while advancing the cause of civil rights at home. Yet Mr. McRae and his fellow airmen didn’t receive appropriate thanks for their efforts at the time. The recognition for the service of the Tuskegee Airmen like Mr. McRae is long overdue and I am grateful for his service to our country.”

The Congressional Gold Medal, not to be confused with the Medal of Honor, is an award bestowed by the Congress in gratitude of great service and patriotism. Since the first such award was approved for George Washington in 1776, approximately 300 Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded. Other recipients of the Congressional Gold Medal include Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II.

In 2006, Congress passed H.R.1259, legislation co-sponsored by Rep. Israel to award the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively. The Tuskegee Airmen were World War II African-American pilots who broke the color barrier at home while fighting tyranny abroad. The presentation ceremony was held in the Capitol Rotunda on March 29, 2007. Following presentation by the President, the medal was given to the Smithsonian Institution, where it was to be displayed. Bronze replicas of the medal were made for individual Airmen, like the one Rep. Israel presented to Mr. McRae Thursday.

Mr. McRae was not able to attend the ceremony in 2007, but was able to secure a medal from Congressman Israel’s office. McRae, a Dix Hills resident, was working in Armonk NY at a train station when he heard screams from the waiting room where the attack on Pearl Harbor had just been announced. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was called into active duty in 1943. McRae participated in the historic Freeman Field Mutiny in 1945, when he and other African-American airmen forcibly integrated the all-white officers club, a chapter in the civil rights movement and major step in the eventual integration of the military.

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Huntington NY— Friday, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) asked the FCC to keep the pressure on both parties to come to the table in the ongoing dispute between News Corporation and Cablevision over retransmission of Fox. The FCC extended an offer to mediate in the dispute, but Fox declined.

Israel said, “I spoke to officials today at the FCC and they confirmed they have offered to mediate arbitration and pledged to keep the heat on both parties to come to the table without disrupting service. Haven quationed Chairman Genachowski about this issue in March, I know that he shares my concerns about the continued brinksmanship of these negotiations that threaten to leave customers in the dark. I’m disappointed that both parties haven’t agreed to hold Giants fans harmless while negotiations continue.”

As the contract between Cablevision and News Corporations nears an end, fears have increased that Fox programming will not be carried on Cablevision. Sports fans would be hit particularly hard by the pulled content, with the Giants games and the World Series shown on Fox. Earlier this year, a breakthrough in negotiations between Cablevision and ABC was reached only a few minutes into the Oscars and a standstill between Time Warner and News Corporation threatened several college bowl games. Israel expressed concern to the FCC Chairman in March that using one-time events as a negotiating tactic only hurts consumers.

Israel is a member of the Financial Services Subcommittee on Appropriations, which oversees FCC funding.